

VANDERBURGH COUNTY CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate)

Background

The mission of Vanderburgh County CASA is to support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy in the community and to serve as a child's voice in court. When a child experiences abuse or neglect and becomes involved with Department of Child Services and the Juvenile Court System, a Judge appoints a CASA to speak on behalf of the child in the court room. Children experiencing abuse or neglect do not belong in a courtroom, but their voice absolutely does. We dream of a community where every child who has experienced abuse or neglect is heard, supported, and safe—with a dedicated CASA volunteer by their side every step of the way so that together we may stop the cycles of abuse and neglect.

Statement of Need

In Vanderburgh County, there are about 1000 children who are part of an open abuse or neglect case and need a CASA. The adults with whom we work often have compounding problems with mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, and housing instability. These families who need help are hurting; and sometimes hurt people hurt people. The CASA team regularly receives threats of physical harm and interacts with hostile and aggressive people at our facility. And the world around us is not naturally getting safer or easier. We have no alarm system, no functioning cameras, no ability to see who is standing at our front door until we are face-to-face with them, and no panic buttons- just an exterior door that won't shut without force, multiple dark spots with overgrown or dead trees around the building- perfect for hiding, and multiple protective orders for staff and volunteers from families who have threatened gun violence or stalked individuals at our facility. We have failed a vulnerability assessment and have received recommendations by local security professionals to install cameras, a security system, lights for the outside of our building, privacy glass film, and to cut back overgrowth.

Project Description

Based on the assessment recommendations, the primary expense of this project is the integrated security system which would give staff access to view exterior doors, visual and audio communication with someone at the front door requesting access to the building before allowing access, and view our two rooms where meetings with families happen. This package includes cameras, a new fob and buzzer entry system, an alarm system with panic buttons, and upgrades to our phone system to support the connectivity.

The secondary costs to this project are for exterior lighting to be purchased and installed, glass privacy film, and tree removal/trimming. Most of the exterior lights have burned out causing the building and parking lot to be so dark at night that you cannot see the other side of the lot which is a cause of fear specifically when the team leaves after our evening training.

CASA is the only agency in Vanderburgh County appointed to represent children in the court system. For us to be able to fulfill this legally mandated mission, we must have a safe facility to be able to retain staff and volunteer advocates.

Project Outcomes

Right now, Vanderburgh County CASA is about 300 volunteers short of being able to serve every child for whom we are court appointed. By mitigating some of the fear of harm while meeting with families in our building, we would be able to more effectively retain and recruit volunteers and serve more children. Each of these outcomes is tracked monthly through our mandated reporting to the State. A more secure space leads to safer kids with a more secure future. Your investment in building security for the future helps keep the children of Vanderburgh County safe and growing toward a brighter future.